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Ding Ning of China will be trying to win her first Olympic gold on Wednesday. "I have been waiting for this for a very long time," the 22-year-old said.

Ding can even defeat Ding

Table tennis star finally got best of toughest opponent — herself

By WU YING and TANG ZHE

It hasn't all been easy for Ding Ning.

As China's top seed in table tennis closes in on what is almost certain to be a gold medal, memories linger from a sad night in Moscow two years ago. The Chinese women's team's dream of clinching its ninth consecutive world championship was crushed by Singapore that May.

Ding's surprise loss to Singapore rival Feng Tianwei in the first round was a huge blow to her confidence and shattered the rest of the team.

The pressure got the best of Ding, who began to question herself. She wasn't on the ros-

ter for the Asian Games or the World Cup.

"It is extremely difficult to come out of the shadow. Many cannot make it, or overcome it so quickly," Ding said.

"I gradually realized that my real opponent was myself. Losing can't beat me — it only causes me to try harder."

Last year, she came back strong. She won the singles and doubles titles at the World Championships in Rotterdam and the World Team Cup in Singapore, climbing to No 1 in the world last November.

Shi Zhihao, the women's head coach, saw it all unfold.

"The 2011 world's women's table tennis belonged to Ding," Shi said.

Ding got the chance to reclaim her crown at the Dortmund championships. She

avenged that Moscow defeat to Feng with a 3-1 victory in the first round of the final.

The Chinese team, in turn, lifted the Corbillon Cup again in Germany.

"Same competition, same opponent. Ding really stood up after she fell down, which, I believe, will make her more mature," Shi said.

Born in 1990, Ding first took up basketball. Her father was a speed-skater and her mother a pro basketball player for the Heilongjiang provincial team.

Ding eventually opted for a smaller ball, and it changed her life forever.

Ding made her name at the age of 17 by winning her first national championship as a member of the Beijing team. She later joined the national squad and emerged as the face of China's national sport.

Knowing she has a responsibility to carry on the glittering legacy of former world champions like Deng Yaping,



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DING NING
WORLD NO 1 WOMEN'S TABLE
TENNIS PLAYER

Wang Nan and Zhang Yining, the 22-year-old believes setting goals is important.

"Setting goals plays an important role in my life," she said.

"You should have a major direction, a much bigger goal, but you should also set up some specific smaller goals in each and every period. Only if you accomplish all the smaller goals will you reach the big ones."

Winning a gold medal in London is, of course, a major goal.

"I have been waiting for this for a very long time. Ever since I was a child, I was dreaming about a world title and an Olympic title. This is my life-long dream," Ding said during an interview after she captured her first singles title at the World Table Tennis Championships in Rotterdam last May. Ding effortlessly won her Olympic debut match in 27 minutes, beating Romania's Daniela Dodean 4-0.

She then defeated Japan's Ai Fukuhara in the quarterfinals, 4-0, and then Feng 4-2 in the semis.

As the current world No 1 and the top seed in London, 22-year-old Ding will strive for her first Olympic gold medal on Wednesday night.

"I feel some pressure because I know lots of people have great expectations for me. But I'm not scared by that," Ding said.

Lithuanian teen an 'adopted Brit'

By AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
in London

Success-starved Britain rushed to claim a slice of Lithuanian teenager Ruta Meilutyte's gold medal glory on Tuesday after the swimmer's remarkable win in the 100m breaststroke.

Meilutyte, who became the youngest winner of the Olympic event at 15 years

and 133 days, goes to school in England and trains at the same Plymouth facility as British poster-boy diver Tom Daley.

While Meilutyte is Lithuania's first Olympic swimming champion, you could be forgiven for thinking the blonde schoolgirl is British given the reaction to Monday's 100m breaststroke win over American world champion Rebecca Soni.

Jon Rudd, her coach at Plymouth Leander swimming club, claimed Meilutyte should be regarded as "our adopted Brit".

"She goes to a British school, swims for a British club and has a British coach, so she is a great British interest story," Rudd told The Daily Telegraph.

"We should feel really proud of her. She is a product of our nation's work. I hope



Brits around the country got behind her. She should be our adopted Brit."

The Daily Mail proclaimed: "Plymouth schoolgirl wins swimming gold ... but it's for Lithuania," while The Independent said "the home support were able to claim a victory of sorts in the 100m breaststroke through Meilutyte. She has already been asked about switching allegiance and firmly declined."

Meilutyte's mother died after being hit by a car when Ruta was four years old and came to England in 2010 with her father and established their new home in Plymouth, where she joined the local swimming club.

She could barely speak after her victory, looking stunned as she straddled the lane rope trying to take it all in amid the tumult around the pool.

Meilutyte, the only female in the Lithuanian swim team, was barely composed as she shed tears on the podium after her country's national anthem was played to sustained applause from the heart-felt crowd at the Aquatics Centre.

"I put all my strength into that race. I still can't believe it. I'm shocked, but in a good way," she said.

"I started crying on the podium. That's when it started to sink in.

"I can't believe it. It's too much for me. It was hard and difficult. But it means a lot to me, and I'm so proud."

Meilutyte's improvement has been stunning. She arrived at the Games with a best time of 1:07.20 and whittled it down by 1.73 sec to become Olympic champion.

Now she owns the fastest time of the year (1:05.21), and her future is boundless.

"It was definitely a surprise, but after her prelim swim, I knew she would be a great competitor," runner-up Soni said.

"It is amazing to be able to do that at 15. She swam three races impressive, so it wasn't out of nowhere.

"It was an honor to have swum with her as she will do great in the future," Soni said.

'Missile Missy' is tearing up the pool

By ASSOCIATED PRESS
in London

Life just keeps on getting bigger and better for Missy Franklin, the teenage swimming sensation whose fame is quickly spreading beyond just in the Olympic pool.

Even Bieber's a believer.

The 17-year-old girl with the can't-miss smile and catchy "Missile Missy" nickname is cheerily living up to the outsized expectations that were heaped on her going into her first Olympics.

Franklin won a gold medal — even before Michael Phelps — in the 100-meter backstroke on Monday after having opened her Games with a relay bronze.

And a certain teen idol took notice.

"Heard (at)FranklinMissy is a fan of mine," singer Justin Bieber tweeted on Tuesday. "Now I'm a fan of hers too! CONGRATS on winning GOLD! (Hashtag) muchlove"

"I just died," Franklin tweeted in response. "Thank you!"

She's still got five more events to go, giving her plenty of chances to leave London as America's big star with Phelps heading into retirement. His underwhelming performances so far and Ryan Lochte's failure in his past two events have swung the spotlight squarely on Franklin.

She finished the semis of the 200 free on Monday night, then raced to the diving well for a quick warmdown. There was no time to make it to the practice pool before her bigger race.

"That was fantastic. She did it exactly right," said Bob Bowman, Phelps' coach.

Even Phelps was amazed at her stamina. He estimated his tightest time between races at a major meet was about 30 minutes.

"She's a racer and she knows what to do," he said, having long ago paid Franklin the ultimate compliment to a swimmer: "She's a stud."

At 1.85 meters, with big hands and size 13 feet, Franklin cuts an imposing figure on the starting blocks. And — Bieber take note — her size is no impediment to her dancing skills.

She shows them off in the US swimming team's recent video spoof to *Call Me Maybe*. Franklin boogies down the aisle of a plane and whips her long brown hair around while lip-synching to the Carly Rae Jepsen tune that has inspired countless viral videos.

Franklin has cracked up her teammates since last summer, when she won three gold medals at her first World Championships in China and set two American records in the process.

offtrack ...

POLICE MAKE ARREST

British police arrested a man on Tuesday after offensive tweets were sent to British diver Tom Daley when he failed to win a medal in his first event at the London Olympic Games.

The Olympic poster boy and his partner Pete Waterfield were in with a chance of clinching the host nation's first gold of the Games in the synchronized 10m platform event on Monday, but fluffed their fourth dive and wound up just outside the medals.

Daley, whose father Robert died from cancer last year, repeated a tweet from user @Riley_69 to his followers that said: "you let your dad down i hope you know that".

The diver responded: "After giving it my all ... you get idiot's sending me this."

The user later apologized.

"A 17-year-old man was arrested by Dorset police officers in the early hours of this morning, Tuesday, at a guest house in the Weymouth area on suspicion of malicious communication," police said.

"He is currently helping police with their inquiries."

NEWSPAPER APOLOGIZES

A Chinese newspaper apologized on Tuesday for attacking one of the country's young Olympic weightlifters for her performance at the London Games.

Zhou Jun failed to lift the starting weight in the 53kg category on Saturday, prompting The Metropolis Times in the southwest city of Kunming to label it "the most shameful defeat for Chinese female weightlifters".

The paper, scorned by readers and commentators, issued an apology and said it lost sight of the Olympic spirit and was aware Zhou, 17, was "only a child".

"You made it to the stage, you gave it your best and you are already our hero," it said.

SERENA BACKS AXE

Wimbledon champion Serena Williams backed the decision to kick Switzerland soccer player Michel Morganella out of the Olympics after he racially abused South Korea's players on Twitter.

Morganella was sent home in disgrace after directing an offensive jibe at South Korea's players following Switzerland's 2-1 defeat to the Asian team on Sunday.

In a post on Twitter that was later deleted, Morganella wrote: "I am going to batter the Koreans, burn them all ... bunch of trisos."

"Trisos" is a French slang word for people born with Down's Syndrome.

Williams, speaking after winning in both the Olympics singles and doubles at Wimbledon on Monday, said Swiss Olympic officials were correct to punish Morganella severely because it's vital to show racism will not be tolerated.



AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE-REUTERS

REPORTER'S LOG | LI XIANG

The Olympic spirit defined by patience

For me, the Olympic spirit is "patience, patience, patience".

I was supposed to arrive in London four days before the Olympic Games' opening to join our reporting team and warm up for our work.

Instead, I spent the night packing my luggage patiently while watching Danny Boyle's fabulous opening ceremony on TV in my apartment in Paris.

The British embassy kept my passport for more than two weeks, and when I received my last-minute visa on the day the Games opened, I told myself it was better late than never.

But I did not realize that was just the start of my frustrating journey across the channel to cover the Olympics.

I arrived an hour early the next day at the Paris North train station.

After dragging my luggage through the crowds, I noticed there was a long immigration and security line in front of me.

I was first examined by the ticket staff at the train station and then by the French immigration officer, who stamped my passport and permitted me to leave France.

Finally, I arrived at my final checkpoint, the UK border control.

As usual, the British immigration officer asked me why I was going to the UK and how long I intended to stay.

I told him I was going to cover the Olympics and would leave after the Games.

Then, he asked me to present my press accreditation. I explained to him that I had registered online with the London Media Center (LMC) and would collect my press pass at the LMC.

Their explanation was that I wouldn't be allowed to enter the UK if I failed to present my press accreditation with my visa.

Over the next 15 minutes, three different officers checked my passport and swiped it again and again on a machine to try to verify my information. I started to get impatient and anxious because my train was leaving soon.

Finally, a more senior-looking officer came and said all I needed to enter the UK was the visa.

I did not have time to reflect on the ridiculous hassle for me to get my visa stamped because my train was leaving in five minutes. I rushed to the platform, and the very instant I hopped on the train, it started to move.

I later learned that, in fact, I was among the lucky ones who made it to London.

US skeet shooter Kim Rhode had her flight from Los Angeles to London canceled twice. In spite of all the unlucky incidents, she still managed to set a world record and won a medal for the fifth time. She missed her flights, but not her target.

That's probably one of the best examples of the Olympic spirit.

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